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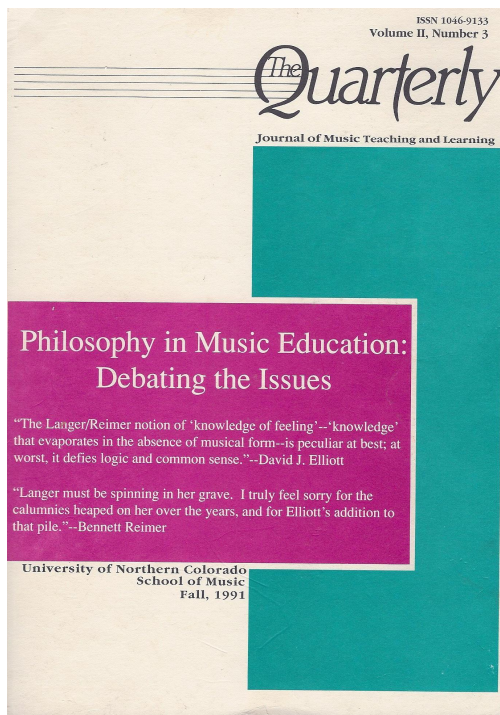
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An Essay Review of Bennett Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education*

By Wayne Bowman
Brandon University

Since music educators have long maintained that philosophy is axiomatic to the profession, it is remarkable how few publications exist on the subject, how infrequently philosophical issues are the object of professional research, and how little time is typically devoted to its exploration in teacher-training programs (let alone in-service professional development efforts). The recent publication in second edition of Bennett Reimer's book is thus a very significant event for North American music education. While others have shared important philosophical visions of music education during the past two decades, Reimer's has clearly been the most influential. For many, philosophy of music education is virtually synonymous with the phrase "aesthetic education," and with the positions Reimer articulated under that banner in 1970.

It will be interesting to see whether the philosophical reflections offered in this second edition are as infrequently contested and disputed in the years to come as those in the first edition appear to have been. I, for one, hope they are not: not so much because I do not share the Reimer vision (in some respects I do), but because I earnestly hope the music education profession will come to take philosophical matters more seriously in the years ahead. If it does, we should expect to see more debate, more evidence of disagreement, and less inclination to conceive philosophy as

a body of doctrine for professional consumption than has generally been the case.

Is this second edition "new"? Yes and no. The text has been extensively revised, and new sections (many of which will be familiar to readers who have followed Reimer's publications over the years) have been incorporated. Reimer concedes understandable "frustration" (xiv) at the task of revision, frustration arising from his sensitivity to the need for greater depth in some areas on the one hand, and his desire to keep the book readable and usable on the other. In most instances, he performs this precarious balancing act relatively well. But the position Reimer first articulated in 1970 has not changed "in any fundamental way:" during the 20 ensuing years, he states, "there has been no discovery that has led me to chart a new philosophical direction" (xiii). While the final chapter does strike out in a substantially new, highly controversial direction (discussed below), the book is essentially an attempt to restate with "more accuracy and power" (xiii) ideas with which the profession has become quite familiar over the years.

My sense is that the second edition's arguments may not always be more powerful, but that they are often clearer. Only, this clarity brings into focus shortcomings which apparently went undetected in the earlier version. Assumptions and biases which were implicit in the first edition stand out in sharp relief in the second. One hopes this may enable readers to more effectively separate Reimer's ideas from the persuasive rhetoric in which they are often presented.

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Another concern which deserves careful scrutiny is the relation between the philosophy and its purported implications for practice. It is, I suspect, possible to subscribe enthusiastically to many of Reimer's eminently sensible recommendations for instructional method without necessarily adhering to his basic philosophical position. If certain instructional and curricular practices can be found to follow from other philosophical bases than those Reimer articulates, their attractiveness should not be mistaken for validation of the philosophy.

In what follows, I offer criticisms of what I perceive to be weaknesses and inconsistencies in Reimer's book and the vision of music education it represents. This is not to declare them bankrupt. Reimer's stature in the profession is well-earned, and many features of his vision have been broadly accepted and have served the profession well. I trust, then, the "Reimer philosophy" is sufficiently secure that it will not suffer excessively from the critical scrutiny to which I propose to subject it here.

I have six basic criticisms of the book. First, it is difficult to shake the distinct impression that what one is reading would have been more precisely entitled *A Philosophy of Arts Education*; music is quite often conspicuous in its absence. As we shall see, this is no accident. Second, the basic philosophical mooring of the book remains the deeply perplexing Langerian notion that art is an analogue of human subjectivity, and, somehow, a teacher of feeling—ideas which are at best elusive, and at worst simply dubious. Third, while the first edition's troublesome circularity (aesthetic...is aesthetic...is aesthetic...) has been attended to, other methodological flaws remain. Instead of even-handed analysis, the book often deploys straw-man tactics and emotional appeals, and it fails to clearly de-

fine key terms or use them consistently. Features like these make for engaging and sometimes inspiring reading, but not the best philosophy. Fourth, the crucial issues of musical standards and evaluative criteria are addressed much later in the book than they need to be for the typical reader; and the rather cursory gloss they eventually receive is obfuscated by a rather confusing polemic on elitism. Fifth, the book's philosophical orien-

tation is essentially monistic and speculative: its claim to be applicable to all music is neither substantiated nor, I think, warranted. And finally, the book concludes with a paradoxical vision in which music education becomes more by aspiring to less: a vision which is bold but misguided. Its widespread endorsement by the profession would both surprise and disappoint me.

"Many of the concepts of aesthetic education remain imperfectly understood and many of its implications for action remain imperfectly applied," says Reimer in his introductory remarks. Yet, at the same time, "the general view it proposes has become the bedrock upon which our self-concept as a profession rests" (xi). These

assertions may well be true; but an imperfectly understood "general" point of view hardly sounds like professional bedrock. Indeed, over the years all manner of fanciful interpretations have attended the slogan "music education as aesthetic education," and as Reimer rightly suggests, these may be in need of sorting out. Dire need, some would say. Unfortunately, if one wishes more than an introduction to the widespread confusion which so often attends the aesthetic doctrine, *A Philosophy of Music Education* may well be a disappointment.

The book begins with the seemingly reasonable statements that "music education

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consists first and foremost to develop every person’s natural responsiveness to the art of music” (xii); that “the essential nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the art of music;” and that “the special character of music education is a function of the special character of the art of music itself” (1). Now never mind for the moment that words like “responsiveness” carry with them potential problems to which several decades of apologizing for the *doing* of music have apparently yet to sensitize us. And never mind that the seemingly innocuous phrase “the art of music” may point us down a rather thorny path. There are more immediate and pressing problems. For statements like these, statements which take as their subject music *per se*, are remarkably infrequent in a book promising to found its philosophy upon the special nature and value of music. Its focus is more often upon the nature and value of *art* and of the *aesthetic* than of *music*.

The deep confusion in which the term “aesthetic” has remained mired for years (its extensive use, if I may, as a kind of verbal “filler” whose primary contribution to sentences in which it is employed is as a bearer of vaguely honorific connotations, an enhancer of apparent integrity) is a concern to which Reimer demonstrates some sensitivity. It is, he concedes after all, imperfectly understood. His solution is twofold. First, and most helpful, he uses the term less frequently. His second strategy for alleviating confusion involves the free substitution of the terms “musical,” “artistic,” and “intrinsic” (and eventually, even “expressive” [56]), for “aesthetic,” on grounds that “they usually mean the same thing...” (xiii).

Unfortunately, the implication that *musical*, *artistic*, *aesthetic*, and so forth, are largely synonymous is neither true nor is it helpful.

Now, there may be those who find this an unjustified point of criticism, but they probably are not philosophers. For the task of clear definition lies at the very heart of philosophy. Confusion over the term *aesthetic* can only be exacerbated by conflating it with a host of other terms. This objection is not, moreover, merely academic or technical. If, for instance, *musical* and *artistic* are interchangeable terms, anything describable as musical must also be artistic: a rather dubious assertion. And if two terms (say, *musical* and *aesthetic*) mean the same but are not equally understood, music educators could presumably speak more clearly and comprehensibly by eliminating one of them (preferably the less clearly understood) from their vocabulary. In this particular case, I would nominate “aesthetic.” One of the primary sources of the traditional confusion surrounding this term has been precisely our tendency to use it so loosely, a tradition whose continuation Reimer apparently favors. In fairness, the second edition does employ the term *aesthetic* less often, in preference for the term *art*. But the fact remains, in neither edition does the primary emphasis appear to have been *music*.

Is all music art? Should it be? These questions are, unfortunately, hardly addressed: Instead, the book discusses the nature of art and the artistic, as if it were obvious that all educationally worthwhile music is subsumed by those labels. Neither the philosophical sophisticate nor the novice can be blamed for wondering: Whatever happened to music? Take chapter titles, for instance: Chapters 2-6 promise, respectively, to explore alternative views of *art*, *art* and feeling, creating *art*, the meaning of *art*, and experiencing *art*. Even Chapter 7, “Experiencing Music,” slips with remarkable nonchalance between discussions of music and *art* as though they

“Readers may think I’m a masochist, but Bowman’s article gave me a certain kind of perverse pleasure. . . . It’s always diverting to tangle with a formalist.” -- Bennett Reimer

were for all practical purposes the same thing. As a result, since the book has promised to explain and base its philosophical perspective upon “the inner workings of music” (12), the reader who complains of frustration at unfulfilled promises may not be entirely without justification.

Of course, all this is no accident. Reimer firmly believes that “*all* art does the same thing and that *all* art can be and should be judged by the same criteria of success” (111). I am rather skeptical that this is true even of all music, let alone all art—unless (as appears to be the case) the term “art” is intended to segregate certain musics from “nonartistic” ones in a way which makes this assertion true by definition. But never mind that for the moment. The point is that the aesthetic argument (even called by another name) lures the author away from what he set out to illuminate. Perhaps this is inevitable, given general aesthetics’ preoccupation with the generic communalities among instances of “art” and “beauty” rather than with individual “arts,” and the subtle but devastating corollary that music is unique only in its means and material—in its distinctive way of doing what all “the arts” (by definition) do. If so, perhaps specifically musical aesthetics (or better yet, philosophy of music) might have proved a more fruitful starting point for a professional philosophy.

On a related point, the book strenuously argues the pragmatic utility of philosophy: first, for purposes of advocacy, and second, as a guide for practice. Curiously, though, Reimer allows that “the task of philosophy is fundamentally different from the task of advocacy...” (8): a particularly noteworthy concession, because he so often offers his philosophy’s utility for advocacy and practice as evidence of its validity. In view of the “fundamental differences” between advocacy and philosophy, one might well anticipate that not all valid philosophical perspectives on music’s

nature and value would offer immediately apparent implications either for the task of advocacy or for musical instruction. It appears that this is in fact Reimer’s position: regardless of their philosophical validity, points of view which do not lend readily apparent support to such nonphilosophical functions as advocacy and instructional method are expendable.

Since, for instance, the existentialist perspective—despite “powerful insights”—does not lend itself “directly or abundantly to problems of mass education,” it is not a dependable base for a philosophy of music education (16). Philosophical perspectives, then, are not to be examined on their *philosophical merits* when “selecting” one upon which to build a music education philosophy. Rather, the criterion is their ease of applicability to mass education. This position seems to compromise the book’s insistence that music education take as its point of philosophical departure the nature and value of music, since we are apparently at liberty to ignore those aspects of its nature and value whose implications for school music are indirect or perhaps disconcerting.

Even more ironically, despite the fundamental significance to music education of music’s nature and value, Reimer is prepared to reject any philosophy which speaks more extensively to *music’s* nature than the nature of “all the arts” (15): “A view confined to a single art, even music, would be unacceptable...” (16). In view of these assumptions, the final chapter’s troublesome recommendations are almost a foregone conclusion. But the point here is that exclusions like these cast serious doubt upon the sincerity of the book’s promise to present a philosophy fundamentally rooted in consideration of *music’s* nature and value.

What is the basic task of philosophy? The roots of at least some of my criticisms of this work extend to this foundational question. Reimer believes its mission is to pursue “that essential, single, unifying concept” (8) which underlies all music (or, to be precise, all *art*).

It is my contention here that this end is achieved only by dismissing a number of important exceptions to that “universal” concept as nonartistic aberrations. In short, while the book maintains (8) that music education philosophy should show what is *unique* and *necessary* about music, it fails in the former, and its explanation of the latter is less than convincing, if not simply wrong.

The book’s manner of presentation remains largely unchanged. For the most part, students will find its language accessible, and its “folksy” tone inviting. But Reimer’s conspicuous rhetorical skills can be something of a double-edged sword, particularly when they take the upper hand from systematic logic. At times, it seems the strategy is to brush aside important rival theories with a rhetorical flourish, then assert and reassert the expressionist thesis until it sounds credible. For instance, the case for absolute expressionism rests upon renunciation of referentialism and formalism. This is achieved by presenting these latter views in ways which make their attractiveness virtually inconceivable: they are straw-men, deliberately flawed foils designed to allow absolute expressionism to emerge victorious. Referential claims, for example, range from extramusical diversions to propaganda. So what the book calls the “most clearcut” (18) example of referentialism, socialist realism, is really its most extreme manifestation, the one most easily rejected. Similarly, formalists are intellectual snobs, elitists who in their heart-of-hearts believe most people too “insensitive” to appreciate music in the esoteric way they do (24). Now, it may well be that no self-respecting music educator would espouse such a position; but then neither would most musical formalists. Unfortunately, the book gives its readers few insights into the rather compelling reasons for which many philosophers have espoused such partial truths as these; it shoots down caricatures deliberately crafted for that purpose.

Absolute expressionism, on the other hand, holds “that the arts offer meaningful, cognitive experiences unavailable in any other way...” (28). Ironically, this is precisely the formalist position, expressed in nonpejorative

terms: whereas Reimer’s formalist finds music a purely cerebral affair, his expressionist finds it a uniquely meaningful cognitive experience. Such ploys are neither philosophically constructive, nor are they fair to a significant and provocative body of literature on musical aesthetics.

What is distinctive about expressionism is, of course, its contention that art’s “meaningful cognitive experiences” derive from a necessary connection between art and feeling: A connection which, Reimer concedes, “it will take the rest of this book to explain” (28). With this, the reader is delivered straight away to the murky waters of early Langerian theory, in which “the arts have a special relation to feeling” (33)—an iconic or isomorphic one which supposedly renders music the tonal analogue of sentence—and which is further held to establish (somehow) that “education in the arts is the education of feeling” (33). This is not the place to explore logical flaws which have been conclusively and repeatedly demonstrated elsewhere, nor should these skeptical remarks be taken as utter rejection of everything Susanne Langer ever wrote. But one crucial logical error deserves mention here, if for no other reason than the fact that it has become such an inextricable part of the belief system espoused by North American music educators: the fact that feeling is often implicated in art (music) hardly supports the conclusion that feeling and (even more importantly) its education are art’s (music’s) *raison d’être*.

But these themes are fundamental to Reimer’s theory: “Creating art, and experiencing art,” Reimer tells us, “do precisely and exactly for feeling what writing and reading do for reasoning” (33). Whatever “extra-artistic” values art may have, its “unique and essential contribution is to educate feeling as only art, as art, is capable of doing” (34).

Now in the first place, this dichotomy between feeling and reason is far too neat and convenient. Reason is neither so purely cerebral, nor is feeling so utterly devoid of mind (so “purely subjective”) as Reimer needs them to be for his argument to stand. More disturbing yet, this argument seems to subtly segregate all values conceivably associated with art

into two mutually exclusive categories: the *feelingful*, and the *extra-artistic*. The inference is circular, true only if one accepts feeling as the essence of art; and this prior assumption is not demonstrated, but simply asserted (and reasserted) as if it were perfectly obvious to all. To me at least, it is not.

The notion that art exists to convey a nonconceptual knowledge of feeling, a knowledge which, were it not for art, would forever elude us, is a vestige of nineteenth-century Idealism, rekindled and given a life well beyond its due by Langer's seductive prose. On this view, Reimer relates, art does not arouse feeling, but reveals its dynamism "in meticulous, specific, and exacting detail" (43). Its concern is not this or that particular feeling, but the essential form, the inner essence of "everything that can be felt" (Langer's remarkable phrase): everything, presumably, from sensation to emotion to the workings of mind. In short, art reveals "the nature of feeling" (50), or more poetically, "the subjective realm of human responsiveness" (53); and the major function of every work of art is to do precisely that" (50). "Every good work of art" presents, in its "artistic qualities," "insights into subjectivity" which are "convincing, vital, and profound." A work which fails to present such vital, revelatory, feelingful experience is "either bad art or nonart" (51).

Little emerges from this discussion which might be of any real guidance in distinguishing mediocre music from masterpieces. Nowhere does the book illustrate how one might rate actual musical compositions using the seemingly crucial notions of art and nonart. This is an unfortunate oversight, given the book's declaration that among the music educator's primary obligations are the selection of "genuinely expressive music" (53) and the illumination of "expressive content" (54).

In the second edition of his book, Reimer makes an admirable effort to unravel at least one strand from the logical knot Langer named "presentational symbolism." Turning away from his 1970 characterization of verbal and artistic meaning as "conventional symbols" and "art symbols" respectively, Reimer wisely avoids that intractable symbol-which-

does-not-symbolize. The new edition prefers "conceptualization" and "aesthetic perceptual structuring" instead (86), and is much improved as a result. The break from Langer is far from complete, though. One still finds remnants, for instance, of the copy-theory of language, which conceives reference as a function of iconic resemblance despite now-overwhelming consensus to the contrary. To this reviewer, it appears that Reimer's revised theory of perceptual structuring can stand quite well on its own—without, that is, recourse to the notion of "discursive symbolism" and all that entails.

In any event, the basic aim of the argument remains the substantiation of a cognitive claim for the arts, one which shows their "special cognitive status" as "intelligent, reasoned, mindful experiences..." (80). A perfectly reasonable statement. Only Reimer continues that these experiences "...yield powerful forms of knowledge of [our] outer and inner worlds" (80), considerably clouding an otherwise lucid and defensible position. Apparently it is assumed that all substantive or worthwhile cognitive experience must be transitive in nature. But the value of musical cognition *per se* (i.e., an "intransitive" cognition which does not pretend to extend beyond the music itself) seems to suffer severely in such a scheme.

Reimer quotes Philip Phenix to the effect that what is distinctive about percepts is their immediacy, their specificity, their nature as singular, particular, and therefore nonconceptual forms. But ever since Kant first contrasted aesthetic "judgments" with conceptualization, it has been obvious that an aesthetic which is utterly nonconceptual is profoundly shallow. It worked for Kant, of course, because he was concerned in the first instance with natural beauty rather than art. Only in music, concepts almost always play an essential role in the experience, and when they do not, we must be prepared to find people doing silly things like faulting plainsong for its lack of a good beat, or fugue for its lack of lyricism—very philistine judgments, indeed. Conceptual understanding is neither so mechanical and abstractive, nor is musical understanding so immediate and conceptless as Reimer would have us believe.

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Now, to be fair, the book does strive to show how “thinking about” is essential to the full experience of art. Only, in the aesthetic “moment,” our conceptual knowledge functions nonconceptually: it is thus a “noticing without naming,” a mental structuring of perceived events “but not according to concepts,” a process of “perceptual integration” (108). This is one of the more lucid sections of the book, but try as I may, I cannot see how this account necessarily implicates any further claim to “the inner feelings of human life as lived and experienced” (93). Such feelings can never be named (indeed, words are “worse than useless” [109] in their description), and the only aspect of the experience which can be “conceptualized and therefore taught objectively and systematically” (109) is perception.

The book’s sometimes proselytical tone becomes most pronounced when Reimer turns his attention to that arch-nemesis of democracy, “elitism.” Again, the book scarcely considers the merits of competing views: those which might hold, for instance, that music education necessarily consists in cultivation, and in the quest of excellence. Instead, it mounts a remarkable attack upon those (formalists?) who supposedly believe that “aesthetic experiences are for some people” (111) rather than for all, and the apparently insidious corollaries of this position, that (i) the same evaluative criteria are not applicable to all art, and (ii) “some human feelings are serious and some are not” (111).

The argument is confusing. And this confusion is compounded by the book’s failure, at this point nearly half-way through, to enlighten the reader as to what these critically important, universally applicable evaluative criteria might be. The student for whom this book is a first venture into a bewildering field has little recourse but to acquiesce to the argument: After all, who wants to be an elitist?

But there are more severe problems. Aes-

thetic experience, Reimer holds against this misguided elitist, is a “hardy weed, growing abundantly and sturdily wherever humans exist” (110), a claim which might well lead one to ask why, this being the case, its education is so terribly crucial. Perhaps it is not so much a weed as a precious cultivar. And perhaps its most precious specimens are, after all, only for some people: namely, for those who have developed their (aesthetic?) perceptual capacities to the fullest. It is difficult to see how one can believe otherwise and still maintain that “musical tastes can be improved, that musical tastes can be deepened” (134). What Reimer apparently intends, then, is simply that everyone has some degree of innate aesthetic sensitivity whose nourishment is an educational obligation. In this, the elitist might well concur.

Elitists, the argument continues, advocate the use of different standards for evaluating different art, whereas, “if they had any respect for art as art they would realize that *all* art does the same thing...and should be judged by the same criteria” (111). The qualities which make a work of art good apply to all art, “no matter its style” (144). The (heroic) populist, on the other hand,

accepts one set of criteria for excellence in art, insists that the criteria be applied across the board, but also insists that works in each kind...of art be judged in terms of its [sic] excellence relative to the characteristics inherent in that kind (112).

The populist further insists that art and artists “must be judged for excellence relatively to what they are creating” (112). Yes. But how is this to be construed as the application of only one set of criteria?

Matters are further complicated by a rather remarkable assertion: “to insist on studying nothing but the monuments of music literature...is to deprive a great many people of any musical satisfaction at all and to expect that all musical experience should be at the deepest level of involvement” (141). I doubt Reimer means what he appears to say here—

“Bowman’s formalism is nowhere more evident than in his defensiveness about my criticisms of elitism. I really pushed his button on this one.” -- Bennett Reimer

that the masses would be deprived of musical satisfaction were their experiences confined to masterworks—for that would be as condescending and patronizing a position as any elitist, real or imagined, has ever maintained.

All the same, Reimer’s “populism” apparently only goes so far: “a vast wasteland of musical inanity exists in the popular music field,” he declares (144). The argument does not continue, as it did in the former edition, that it is largely misguided to judge popular music (“as a whole”) by musical standards (1970, 107); and yet if one insists *all* music does the same thing, it seems clear enough that one must concede that some does that thing better, some worse, and perhaps some hardly at all. Presumably this would qualify as the application of one set of criteria, but it does not sound very “populistic.”

The most direct escape from this labyrinth would appear to be the simple concession that not all art (music?) aspires to do or be the same thing, thereby repudiating the notion that the same criteria apply everywhere. One cannot, without a serious lapse in logic, simultaneously maintain that music be judged relatively (to its style) and absolutely (as music). And there is relatively little danger that conceding multiplicity and relativity will transform one into an elitist.

After 118 pages devoted to explaining the nature of art, of the artistic, of the aesthetic, of feeling, and of expression, the book turns to *musical* experience. And at last the reader is apprised of those universally applicable criteria which seemed so crucial to understanding earlier discussions. The “four criteria for assessing the quality of any art work” (no, not music, but *art work*) are: craftsmanship, sensitivity, imagination, and authenticity (134). *Craftsmanship* is “the expertness with which the materials of art are molded into expressiveness:” at its best, it has “something almost spiritual about it,” and without it one encounters “skill devoid of heart” (135). *Sen-*

sitivity is the artist’s (the work’s?) “intouchness” with feelings, the “depth and quality of feeling captured in the dynamic form of a work;” in its absence, one encounters only “the surface of feeling,” or “immediate gratification” (136). *Imagination* “deals with the vividness of an art object:” it is what “grabs us,” what “captures our feelings” (137). And *authenticity* concerns the “honesty,” the “morality” of art—a “fidelity to its inner needs” which, when we experience it, somehow “ennobles” our humanity (138-9). Taken together, these four criteria illuminate “the inner integrity of the expressive core in a piece of music,” its “truth to feeling” (140).

Now, we are all sympathetic to the complexity of defining concrete criteria for estimating musical value. But since the value of music is supposed to be one of the two pillars on which both the advocacy and the doing of musical education stand, one might have hoped for something rather less poetic here: something, say, applicable by the average music educator to an actual piece of music. Despite an undeniable surface appeal, neither the universality, nor the utility, nor, indeed, the *meaning* of these criteria is at all clear: hardly a propitious state of affairs for a cornerstone of musical education.

Reimer’s argument would be far more cogent had he chosen to *demonstrate* the application of these criteria to several actual pieces of music. If every piece selected and every instructional decision is indeed a reflection of one’s assumptions about music’s nature and value, this is hardly the place for vagueness and vagary. Moreover, if these criteria are indeed universal, their application to a variety of markedly contrasting musical styles would be instructive. Discussion of Charles Leonhard’s well-known distinction between “good” and “great” music, for example, was greatly enhanced by its illustration: in fact, his examples may have been more revealing than the principle they were intended to demonstrate. Reimer’s criteria,

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then, remain rather nebulous, if not simply arcane. They are supposedly applicable to *all music*, but the book applies them to *none*. Of course this hardly establishes that the task cannot be done. But since the book has grounded all musical value in feeling, and indeed, in feeling of a kind which (by definition) defies all description, the task of differentiating genuine musical value from mere personal preference or “taste” is too critical a matter to be left unexplored.

A brief personal commentary may help clarify the nature of my objections here. Obviously, I do not share all of Reimer’s basic assumptions. I would prefer to see music evaluated purely in terms of what it *aspires to be*, what it *is*, instead of what it is “analogous” to, or how “deeply” it makes one feel. I believe that music has many values, not one (aesthetic, or artistic), or even four. I believe personally that musical education earns its place in the schools to the extent it is conceived and pursued as value education. I believe that musical education is not so much about feeling, however globally defined, as about *music*. I do not believe, personally, that music (or anything else for that matter) has “intrinsic” value, but that all value is grounded. As such, I conceive musical education as a quest fundamentally committed to the illumination, recognition, and understanding of musical values: values which are multiple, diverse, divergent, and often indeterminate. To the extent *A Philosophy of Music Education* fails to illuminate this essential diversity, it may actually constrict rather than broaden our conceptions and perceptions of music.

In chapters eight and nine, Reimer turns to the general music and performance programs, respectively. These chapters are well written

and insightful; but it is not consistently clear how their practical conclusions are necessarily implicated by the book’s particular philosophy. On the other hand, even readers who find the philosophy inconsistent and enigmatic may find these chapters useful and provocative. Reimer’s reputation for curricular expertise is obviously well-deserved.

Both chapters are structured after a sequential curricular model derived from John Goodlad, consisting of seven phases: philosophy (the “values” phase), conceptualization, systematization, interpretation, operation, experience, and expectation (152). Reimer’s discussion of the nature of “musical literacy” should be mandatory reading for a profession gone literacy-mad. So should his critique of faulty bases for instructional sequence, and his argument that high school general music is “unconscionably neglected” (180).

The chapter on performance is essentially sound, though not without difficulties, several of which warrant passing consideration. Reimer blames music education’s lopsided (as he perceives it) emphasis on performance excellence on the university, with its apparently disproportionate emphasis upon private lessons (heavy practice demands) and “performance organizations” (heavy concert schedules). University applied-music teachers, he explains, are “driven to turn out fine performers,” and “performers directors [sic] are driven to present fine concerts” (198). It is on those bases, he explains, that they are evaluated. Reimer urges that the school music community should not be “sucked into this professional whirlpool” (198).

This remarkable metaphor is far from benign. Not only does it raise unfortunate questions about school music’s commitment to musical excellence, it erects barriers where bridges are needed: surely a great deal of

“Now this shocks me. It is hard for me to believe that Bowman is that bad a musician or is that out of touch with the realities of music teaching. Has he never given a lesson? Has he never judged a contest or festival?”--Bennett Reimer

extraordinarily effective *musical education* goes on in the applied studio and in the ensemble experience. In fact, one dares suggest it is in precisely these settings that many of our most enduring and profound musical learnings occur.

It eventually becomes clear that the book is not advocating the renunciation of quality performance, only urging it be directed to enhancing the broad musicianship, refined sensitivity, and educational understanding worthy of the name “curriculum” rather than “performance-for-the-sake-of-fine-performance” (198-9). Of course the university might well respond that this is precisely what happens in its studios and ensembles, and ask how Reimer thinks it possible for genuinely “fine” musical performance to occur in the absence of significant musical learnings.

It is one thing to argue that public school populations are younger, or less musically “select,” and that musical instruction and literature selection should reflect these truths, but quite another to imply that university music instruction is geared (“driven”) to performance excellence in a way which is inimical to musical education. Surely university schools of music are at least as concerned with the development of musicality, sensitivity, understanding, and the like as are public schools. Participation in a musical performance of superb calibre can, moreover, be an extraordinarily influential teacher—sometimes more influential and enduring than the particular manner in which it is prepared. School music could do far worse than to emulate the musicianship and educational savvy of the many exceptional individuals who teach music in university settings.

To be sure, there are crucial differences between universities and public school classrooms. Any responsible teacher education program must help students face that fact. But a profession wishing to be known as

“music education” rather than mere “school music” must also accept that a great deal of extraordinarily sensitive and effective musical instruction occurs outside the schools, and attempt to explore it for instructional principles applicable to a variety of musical settings. To the extent “music education” is taken to apply only to such activities as occur in school classrooms, the name has rather a hollow ring.

Reimer concludes his chapter on musical performance with a plea that composition become an equal partner in the performance curriculum. This is, he argues, more nearly attainable today than at any other period in history, given the advanced state of modern technology. The point is well taken. And yet the preparedness of music teachers to deal with either the technological means or the compositional process may be another matter. Music-teacher education programs will have to make truly radical curricular changes if their graduates are to develop competence and confidence with either the electronic tools or the creative processes Reimer has in mind. The modest success of improvisational instruction in jazz should alert us to the enormity of the latter problem in particular.

These challenges should be borne centrally in mind as one considers the remarkable thesis of the final chapter, to the effect that music education has become all it can within the existing educational scheme of things (cf. 241), and that the way of enhancing its status lies in becoming a fuller partner in the broader arts-education movement. Although it doubtless makes me one of those “narcissistic” music educators (228) who selfishly demand more than their fair share of the curricular pie, I would argue that there remains plenty for music education to do in getting its own house in order before redirecting its primary efforts and a major portion of its re-

sources to the overall arts-education agenda.

In one sense, of course, Reimer is absolutely correct: music education cannot help but be strengthened by cooperative alliances with other “arts education” enterprises. Collectively we can wield far more clout than any of us can individually. United we stand ...and so forth. But this is not just about clout. Beyond the obvious political advantages, the reader is told, this synergistic vision promises philosophical, psychological, practical, and professional benefits (227-8).

If it seems self-evident that music education may traditionally have been rather parochial and self-centered, and that we need to nurture relationships with what Reimer calls our “sister arts,” consider where the argument leads him. The way to further improving and securing our status in the school system lies not in our own “internal, bootstrap efforts:” that is “self-deception” (223). Of course it is essential that we continue to improve what music education is now, but it is even more important that we work to forge a “new vision” (226), one in which “we become an integrated part of a field that...is larger than, more important than, more influential than we can ever be by ourselves. That field is arts education” (227).

This conclusion comes as no surprise, given the book’s persistent equation of music with art and the arts. But if one has come to the book looking for what its title seems to promise, this is more than a little disconcerting. For it seems to have concluded, albeit implicitly, that what is needed is not a philosophy of music education, after all: a philosophy of arts education will do quite nicely. For purposes of advocacy this may or may not be true; but as a guide for music instructional practice, it is precipitous in the extreme, since its musical roots are quite shallow. To be sure, Reimer does attempt to reassure the reader that “the differences among the arts are much more fundamental than are their apparent similarities” (229). Unfortunately, this statement sounds rather half-hearted given the book’s relentless insistence that “all art serves the same function” (229). The music educator interested in exploring the *distinctive* nature and value of music, then, may have come to the wrong

place. According to Reimer, any value claim one can make for music “can be made equally validly by every other art” (227). All the arts “have an equal right to the same share” of curricular time, and music educators should “learn the hard lesson that our needs must be met in the context of our family’s needs” (228).

Becoming “more generous to our own family,” Reimer promises, will yield “more minutes per week than we have ever managed or will ever manage to cajole on our own. We have nothing practical to lose...and a great deal to gain” (228). Perhaps not, if “cajoling” is the extent of our aspiration. But what of musical education? Despite assurances to the contrary, it is rather difficult to interpret this appeal to “generosity” as anything but a petition for more modest musical expectations. Although it would be nice to have it both ways, the argument sounds suspiciously like a politician’s promise to reduce taxes and the national debt while at the same time increasing social services.

What Reimer has in mind, ideally, is a “general arts class” required of all K-8 students, and utilizing the “common elements” approach (237). The class would meet an hour each day and be taught by certified specialists in “music, visual arts, dance, theater, poetry and literature...film and media” (238). Should this prove too ambitious, a little digging could turn up community “paraprofessionals” to fill the gaps (239). Only, if—as the book argues—what is good for other arts is equally good for music, we must presumably be prepared to see music taught by “paraprofessionals” as well.

I would be the last to argue against better links to existing “arts communities,” or against enhanced communication, more effective collaboration, and less provincialism in music education. But the ideal of a music education *profession* with its distinctive self-concept, goals, and standards is hardly a narcissistic vestige of the past. And until the unlikely day when society becomes sufficiently enlightened to allocate unlimited resources to education in all the arts, a music education profession’s first obligation must remain *musical* education whatever its “limitations...as a separate field” (241).


What Reimer calls the “irony” of his position is not really ironic at all. When we adopt as our philosophical base a position whose fundamental assumption is the similarity of all the arts, we should hardly be surprised to find it leading inexorably to arts education. Despite the valuable insights afforded by such a perspective, it must not divert us from the prior truth that music education exists first and foremost to nurture *musical* understanding.

Despite its faults and blemishes, *A Philosophy of Music Education* contains many of the profound insights one expects of a scholar of Bennett Reimer's stature. There is ample food for thought here, so long as one reads critically rather than soporifically. All the same, one would like to believe that the profession's philosophical sophistication has grown sufficiently in 20 years to justify a more thoughtful and even-handed treatment of issues and perspectives than this book often attempts. To those who find this assessment overly harsh and these remarks “too picky,” I can only respond that in philosophy no less than in music, seemingly little differences usually make *all* the difference.

Taken collectively, the concerns expressed in this review lead one to caution briefly against two additional potential pitfalls inherent in this book. First, it may teach by example that philosophy need not be exacting or rigorous, and that philosophy is simply the expression of opinion. Second, the book may serve (however unintentionally) to undermine the credibility of philosophy's rightful claim to pragmatic value. There is consolation in the fact that the book reaches many valid practical conclusions, but in philosophy as music, the process is often more important than the product. These are not insuperable obstacles to the book's use by musically sensitive and philosophically articulate teachers. And after all, few philosophical books worth reading do not require careful interpretation. All the same, the book should probably be approached with a high degree of (let us say) critical objectivity.

It would be unfair and probably inaccurate to suggest that Reimer's vision has outlived

its usefulness. His many valid insights should not be discarded because a few of them (albeit, some fairly pivotal ones) are flawed. One hopes, however, that this second edition may be studied more critically and reflectively than it appears the first often was. It would be irresponsible of the profession to give this important book anything less than the close scrutiny it deserves, but one dares to hope that during the next two decades *A Philosophy of Music Education* will be but one inspiring vision among a broad array to which the profession gives serious consideration.

Due in no small part to the influence of Reimer (and of course, others before him), a “philosophy of music education” has become something every responsible member of this profession is expected to “have.” But the profession will have taken a tremendous stride forward when it finally comes to accept that its strength and integrity do not require that all its members “have” the *same* one: that unity does not require conformity, either on the practical or the ideological level. 

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